

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 23, 2009

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
Government Accountability Office
441 G. Street, N.W.
Room 7125
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office investigate the activities of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, to determine whether the organization misused congressionally appropriated funds. We ask that this review include whether such funds were used in support of potentially illegal activity.

Since 1994 ACORN has received over \$53 million in federal funds, yet it has been plagued with numerous instances of wrong-doing and fraud. For example, last summer it was uncovered that approximately \$1 million was embezzled from the organization by the brother of its founder, yet the organization failed to report the theft to its Board or law enforcement officials until the theft was made public by the media.

Last year in Seattle, local prosecutors indicted seven ACORN workers for conduct considered to be the worst case of voter registration fraud in Washington state history. Of 2,000 names submitted by ACORN, only nine were confirmed as valid. The rest—over 97%—were false. In Missouri, officials found that over 1,000 voter addresses submitted by ACORN did not exist. Eight ACORN employees pled guilty to federal election fraud there. In Ohio, an employee of one ACORN affiliate was given crack cocaine in exchange for fraudulent registrations that included underage voters and deceased individuals. Last year in Pennsylvania, a former ACORN worker was charged with 19 counts of perjury, making false statements, forgery and identity theft. Ultimately, voter registration fraud allegations have led ACORN to be subject to investigation in 20 states and ACORN and its employees have been charged with over 50 different counts of election-related fraud. In addition, ACORN has paid over \$1 million in restitution to avoid criminal prosecutions.

Equally troubling is an October 22, 2008, *New York Times* article describing an internal report prepared for ACORN expressing concerns about “potentially improper use of charitable dollars for political purposes; money transfers among [ACORN’s] affiliates; and potential conflicts created by employees working for multiple affiliates.”¹

¹ Stephanie Strom, “ACORN Report Raises Issues of Legality,” *The New York Times* (October 22, 2008).

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It is likely just this sort of information that led the U.S. Census Bureau to inform ACORN earlier this month that it would terminate their partnership for the 2010 Census stating, "Unfortunately, we no longer have confidence that our national partnership agreement is being effectively managed through your many local offices."²

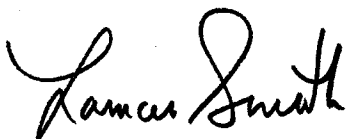
Most recently, there is evidence that ACORN employees have been prepared to assist in interstate and international trafficking of young women and girls for sexual purposes. Undercover video from private citizens appears to show ACORN employees willing to conspire with persons they believed to be involved in prostitution and trafficking of persons.

Based on ACORN's previous conduct and recent reports suggesting continued fraudulent and other illegal activity, it is no wonder that on a bi-partisan basis, Members of Congress recently voted to defund ACORN. However, there remains significant concern that millions of taxpayer dollars were used improperly, and possibly criminally, by the organization. Thus we request that GAO conduct a review of the use of all federal funds received by ACORN since 1994.

Members of Congress have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used according to the purpose for which they are appropriated. When faced with numerous allegations of fraudulent and criminal conduct by a federal grantee, such as those that now face ACORN, it is important that Congress understand the extent to which ACORN may have defrauded the American people so that future Congresses can take steps to ensure that such blatant misuse of funds does not occur again and that wrong-doers are prosecuted.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Lamar Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary



Darrell Issa
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform

cc: The Honorable John Conyers, Jr
The Honorable Edolphus Towns

² Major Garrett, "U.S. Census Bureau Severs Ties with ACORN for 2010 Census, Fears Group's Bad Reputation Could Undermine Count," available at <http://whitehouse.blogs.foxnews.com/2009/09/11/us-census-bureau-severs-ties-with-controversial-group-ACORN/>.